

Tourism governance and regional development in the German – Czech borderlands: an interdisciplinary perspective

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The ‘conflict-free’ image of tourism has resulted in the perception that cross-border tourism cooperation is relatively easy to establish compared to other sectors dealing with development and planning. Moreover, since tourism can bring gains to peripheral areas and since borderlands can provide specific attractions to tourists, tourism development can be an interesting tool to overcome the socio-economic barrier effect of (inter)national borders. Yet, a detailed understanding of multi-level cross-border governance is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism for cross-border regional development. Therefore, this paper aims to identify complexities in cross-border tourism governance processes by combining a tourism focus with insights from regional and political sciences. Using a German - Czech borderlands case-study, we found that tourism is recognized by most respondents as one of the easier topics for establishing local cross-border projects. However, the different vertical organization and large thematic and spatial dispersal of tourism-related responsibilities provide fundamental bottlenecks for structural alignment of tourism governance systems across international borders. Moreover, comparison of the German – Czech border with the inner-German Bavarian – Saxonian border shows that cross-border tourism cooperation is not automatically easier when the vertical institutional mismatch is less pronounced. We identified a layer of more ‘hidden’ complexities related to planning structures, inward stakeholder orientation and lower perceived necessity to cooperate. An interdisciplinary cross-border perspective on tourism governance thus shows that tourism is not such a ‘conflict-free’ sector after all. Several layers of complexities need to be overcome before tourism can be a successful regional development tool in border areas.